

AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND HISTORY ON SCREEN: *The Life and Times of Lord*

*Mountbatten*

Abstract: The television series, *The Life and Times of Lord Mountbatten* (1968), was a unique collaboration between an independent production company, Associated-Rediffusion, a national museum, the Imperial War Museum, and one of the most famous aristocratic and military figures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Lord Mountbatten. Furthermore, Mountbatten was the programme's presenter, appearing on screen to describe his experiences autobiographically. Through the use of film and images, Mountbatten's 'life' was intertwined with the historical 'times' of over half a century. Though praised at the point of its release to British audiences in 1969 by the public, critics and historians alike, *The Life and Times of Lord Mountbatten* has since largely been ignored by scholars interested in the history-on-television genre. By detailing the origins, format, production and reception of the series, and by comparing it to both *The Great War* (1964) and *The World at War* (1973-1974), which were also produced in conjunction with the Imperial War Museum, the immediate success and subsequent failure of *The Life and Times of Lord Mountbatten* to attract popular and academic attention provides an argument for widening the discussion on television history and its limited categorizations.

Key words: autobiography, history, television, Imperial War Museum, *The Great War*, *The World at War*.

To tell the story of this century on television is in itself a formidable task. To focus this story on one single man, however remarkable his career, breaks new ground. This series is not only about Lord Mountbatten, it is *with* him and that gives this television history a unique dimension.<sup>1</sup>

Academic literature concerning factual history programmes is abundant with references to *The Great War* and *The World at War*, which were television series made in collaboration with the Imperial War Museum (IWM) from 1963-1964 and 1971-1974 respectively. In 1968, in between these two productions, the IWM-Rediffusion partnership produced the lesser known *The Life and Times of Lord Mountbatten (The Life and Times)*. This series conveyed the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century through the experiences of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Louis Mountbatten, 1st Earl Mountbatten of Burma, in 12, one-hour episodes shown by Thames Television (Thames). *The Life and Times* contained a mixture of archive footage and talking heads, alongside new film and interviews on location in countries such as Malta and India. Rather unusually, however, Mountbatten himself was the series' presenter. *The Life and Times* therefore transcended the categorization of documentary formats for history on television; either the classic use of interviews, archive material and narration, or the presenter as a guide to shared experience.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, Mountbatten was not a presenter-historian, as we would consider Simon Schama or Jeremy Paxman today, but clearly assumed an autobiographical role.

*The Life and Times* was distinctly unconventional within the history-on-television genre; this was presented history as autobiography, with a celebratory tone. Why,

then, does *The Life and Times* receive little attention from historians? This article aims to demonstrate that *The Life and Times* was well received by the public and reviewers when it was first broadcast in 1969, and that the museum gained huge, positive publicity from the programmes and the premiere, which was held at IWM London with Royal attendees. However, the tension and confusion between autobiography, biography, and history, as well as the shadow of Mountbatten's personality on critical reception, created a negative impression on scholars and help explain the series' loss of durable impact. However, asking the broader questions, such as did *The Life and Times* matter? What was its social purpose and value? How can this programme help us understand current debates about television? could shed new light on its significance to the television history genre.

In order to fully understand the unique nature of *The Life and Times*, the article first explores the origins of the television series with a brief discussion of the developments in television history, and at the IWM, in the 1960s, followed by an exploration of Mountbatten's personal interest in film and his desire to capture his experiences in this medium. The format of the series is then examined with a particular focus on the meaning and balance of 'life' and 'times,' as well as a comparison of Mountbatten as a presenter to other television history figures of the 1960s and 1970s, including Kenneth Clark and Jacob Bronowski. Subsequently, the production and reception of *The Life and Times* are addressed, exploring the collaboration between Rediffusion, the IWM and Mountbatten, as well as critical and popular responses to the series. As recent academic discussion of factual history series has focused on *The Great War* and *The World at War*, the final section of the

article compares these with *The Life and Times* in order to understand their contrasting popularity.<sup>3</sup>

### Origins

Television experienced a boom in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1967, 9 out of 10 households had television sets, and the British were Europe's most avid viewers. Watching television was therefore the principal leisure activity, and this continued into the 1970s.<sup>4</sup> In 1955, after the Television Act of the year before, the BBC's monopoly ended with the introduction of ITV. ITV came under the Independent Television Authority (ITA) and was the first broadcaster entirely funded by advertising. The BBC and ITV battled for ratings until 1964 when BBC2 was launched, and 1982 when Channel 4 began broadcasting. By 1969, BBC2 had become the iconic factual history channel and ITV could not compete: between 1970 and 1979, BBC1 and 2 combined accounted for 71% of factual history programming compared to 29% at ITV.<sup>5</sup>

In the 1960s and early 1970s, the IWM made a shrewd decision to collaborate with broadcasters, who offered their huge audiences an insight into the museum's film and photographic collections. In fact, during these two decades, the IWM built upon its already significant interaction with film collection and preservation since its formation in 1917, including the establishment of a Cinematograph Department in 1920 and a nitrate-to-acetate reprinting project from 1931-1933, which was funded by the Treasury.<sup>6</sup> In 1960, Dr. Noble Frankland was appointed Director of the IWM.

He, in turn, employed Dr. Christopher Roads as Keeper of the Department of Records in 1962. Together they set out to promote film and history at the IWM as a way to engage with popular history, publicity, and technical progression. Frankland and Roads coordinated 4 further developments: more funding from the Treasury to preserve film acquired since 1933; the construction of a new cinema as part of an extension to the main building in 1966, which improved public access to the museum's film collection; membership of international film and television associations, including FIAF (International Federation of Film Archives) and the IFTC (International Film and Television Council); and positioning the IWM at the forefront of the film and history movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, which promoted film as an important academic source.

Though the IWM was eager to enter into broadcasting projects, the origin of *The Life and Times* was a family affair. The idea belonged to Lord Brabourne, Mountbatten's son-in-law, and a television producer, who persuaded Mountbatten to consider featuring in a history series about his experiences. Mountbatten disclosed that one of the additional reasons why he agreed was because his daughter had asked for something to show her children of their grandfather's life. Brabourne ensured that Mountbatten would possess the foreign rights to the resulting film, which could be exploited for the benefit of the Broadlands Trust set up for Mountbatten's children and grandchildren.<sup>7</sup> However, Mountbatten's own motivations went beyond the familial. In one of the early scripts for the first episode filmed at Broadlands, Mountbatten explained his decision to appear on screen:

I've always refused to write my own autobiography, or to authorize anyone to write a biography in my lifetime. I consider that there have been enough controversies already, without me joining in. But all my life I have been involved in Communication-indeed, I still am-and I believe that Television can communicate something which is unique...<sup>8</sup>

Though Mountbatten was not interested in any written text about his life and experiences, he had always been fascinated by the medium of film. Mountbatten had a large film collection at his home in Broadlands and had also received as a wedding present a short clip entitled *Nice and Friendly* featuring himself, his wife, Edwina, Charlie Chaplin and other friends on their honeymoon in 1922. His personal collection was later moved to the IWM where it was stored on behalf of the Broadlands Archive Trust and was made available for scholarly and public use.<sup>9</sup> However, film was not just a hobby for Mountbatten. His naval specialism was in signals and his interest in communications became a vocation within the service as well as his trade; Mountbatten aimed to promote films as instructional and morale-boosting. For example, as flag-lieutenant in the *Renown* in 1920, Mountbatten directed and animated a film to depict Fleet manoeuvres, and as junior officer in the *Revenge* in 1923, he set up a projection room and attempted to establish the Royal Naval Film Corporation. Unfortunately, the Lordships of the Admiralty did not share Mountbatten's enthusiasm for film and endorsed neither of his efforts for its wider promotion in the Navy.<sup>10</sup> Approximately 20 years later, Mountbatten was successful in convincing Noel Coward and the naval authorities to make and approve *In Which We Serve* (1942), which was loosely based on the sinking off Crete of HMS Kelly, of

which Mountbatten had been Captain. In addition, as part of Mountbatten's work on Combined Operations in 1942, he invited cameramen, photographers and journalists onto the *Prinz Albert* in order to record the crew's training exercises. The resulting newsreels were shown throughout cinemas in Britain and though the films tended more towards entertainment than news, they were a rare opportunity for the public to glimpse the events that were shaping their lives.<sup>11</sup> It therefore seems characteristic that Mountbatten would choose the medium of television to convey his life and times.

Mountbatten's desire to capture a semi-autobiographical account of himself on film perhaps has greater significance; very few people have the opportunity to create a series of this sort about their experiences, much less one that must also appeal to a public audience. Mountbatten's status and influence were clearly crucial to the potential success of the series, though it may not have been sufficient to capture the expected 15 million viewers on their own.<sup>12</sup> His interaction with the historical events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century shifted the focus onto a wider, and more relevant, popular history. Peter Morley, the series' director, and John Terraine, the script writer were crucial to this shift. Morley had won 2 BAFTAs prior to his work on *The Life and Times*, and Terraine was a successful military historian who had contributed substantially to the script for *The Great War*.<sup>13</sup> The series was therefore supported by a credible and discerning crew, as well as the independent production company Associated-Rediffusion. Morley knew Brabourne through the council that eventually emerged as BAFTA in 1975, to which they were both appointed Foundation Trustees. Brabourne had originally suggested the Mountbatten series to the BBC and Hugh



Greene had initially agreed to the project, which would start once Mountbatten had retired. Upon his retirement, Brabourne sent a letter to the BBC to suggest the commencement of work on the series. The reply from the BBC stated that the broadcaster had decided against the project, though no reason was given as to why. It was then that Brabourne approached Morley and Rediffusion.

Morley, in turn, contacted Terraine, and the IWM. In the early stages of the planning, Morley was unsure of the balance between the story of Mountbatten's life and the context surrounding it. Thus, his first task was to find an historian and writer. Terraine was persuaded to join the project as he had enjoyed working on the script for *The Great War* and was interested in the possibility of the original filming on the Mountbatten series.<sup>14</sup> Thus, *The Life and Times* paired a television director with an historian, a production company with a museum, and an individual life with the events of a century. The concept was a unique and complex venture into history on television.

### Format

Even the title of the series requires examination. 'Life,' in direct relation to an individual, is straightforward, for example, factual insights concerning birth date, time and place. 'Times' on the other hand could refer either to a period of history contemporary to the activities of a notable person or to a period of history with reference to its general and predominant moods or ideas. The former definition is the most likely in the context of *The Life and Times*, which emphasises the already

exaggerated historical significance of Mountbatten. 'Times' paired with 'life' is distinctly not history or context and so the title suggests the series is about Mountbatten's experiences, and memories of a history, that may otherwise be shared, for example, in broader interpretations of the Second World War or the partition of India. The viewer is therefore not necessarily learning about history through a variety of sources, but about an individual and his particular experiences.

The 12 episodes were entitled as follows:

- 1 'The King's Ships were at Sea' (1900-1917)
- 2 'The Kings Depart' (1917-1922)
- 3 'The Azure Main' (1923-1936)
- 4 'The Stormy Winds' (1936-1941)
- 5 'United We Conquer' (1941-1943)
- 6 'The Imperial Enemy' (1943-1945)
- 7 'March to Victory' (March to September 1945)
- 8 'The Meaning of Victory' (1945-1947)

9 'The Last Viceroy' (February to August 1947)

10 'Fresh Fields' (1947-1955)

11 'Full Circle' (1955-1965)

12 'A Man of this Century' (1900-1968)

The dates the episodes examine are perhaps more suggestive of the programmes' content than the titles. 'The Azure Main,' for example, explores Mountbatten's naval career as well as the social circles in which he and Edwina inhabited, whilst 'United We Conquer' focuses on combined operations planning during the Second World War. The series covers Mountbatten's remarkable yet varied life, and thus struggles to depict a clear aim. Though each episode contains an examination of both 'life' and 'times,' there exists an imbalance between autobiography and history. For example, episodes 5 and 6, which cover the Second World War, arguably contain more history than episodes 1 and 2, which focus on Mountbatten's family and friends. Further details of the episodes can be found in John Terraine's textual accompaniment to the television series.<sup>15</sup>

The mixing of autobiography, biography and historical depiction together on screen was a significant point of tension during the production of *The Life and Times*. The autobiographical role was exaggerated by the fact that Mountbatten inhabited the role of presenter, but not as presenter-historian. Though he was an authority on his

own life, he was not an historian, nor was he detached from many of the events featured in *The Life and Times*. This was of course the premise of the series but it meant that Mountbatten was a focus even when the programmes shifted to the broader history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. With Mountbatten at the centre, bias and egotism were inevitable, restricted only by Terraine's script, which reformatted Mountbatten's own words (see 'Production'). From autobiography to a combination of biography and reflections upon wider historical events, *The Life and Times* oscillated between two vastly different modes of historical expression. In principle, to treat the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with objectivity and distance, and Mountbatten's actions within that history in a sympathetic way, constructed an unavoidably skewed account. The bias, albeit moderate, was evident on screen.

The autobiographical nature of *The Life and Times* is at once its advantage and downfall; Mountbatten as presenter-autobiographer makes the series unique but also lays it open to criticism, or even leaves it difficult to criticise on a level comparable to other history programmes. Autobiography on screen is a rarely used technique. Audiences of the late 1960s were instead familiar with presenters of history-on-television. A.J.P. Taylor, who appeared in 7 lecture series between 1957 and 1967, has been labelled the first 'telly-don,' and was considered history's counterpart for Kenneth Clark (art) and Sir Mortimer Wheeler (archaeology).<sup>16</sup> Clark is another recognisable name in the television history genre, even today (Tate Britain mounted the exhibition 'Kenneth Clark: Looking for Civilisation' from 19 May to 10 August 2014). The 13, 50 minute episodes that created Clark's series *Civilisation* (1969) have been labelled 'legendary' and given Clark a 'pioneering role' in mass

broadcasting, alongside Alistair Cooke and David Attenborough. Unlike Mountbatten, Clark had been able to hone his on screen persona through his considerable experience as the broadcaster of approximately 36 lectures from 1958 to 1965. Maurice Wiggin, after Clark's 1963 *Michelangelo* series, praised his affability without the loss of authority, whilst John Wyver believes the effortless confidence of Clark's judgments is what made him an expert presenter.<sup>17</sup> Clark's previously developed presenting skills and his obvious personal knowledge of art history made him a credible figure in television history.

Following *Civilisation*, Jacob Bronowski presented 13 episodes on the history of science in *The Ascent of Man*. Bronowski has said he was invited to the BBC to make such a series to match *Civilisation* and Clark. Bronowski was concerned with television as a conversational medium, the viewer as a witness to the actions of people and not events. This was important to him in agreeing to 'cast a personal biography of ideas in the form of television essays.'<sup>18</sup> As presenter-historians, Clark and Bronowski's intellectual authority came from an individual and informed perspective. Simon Schama's *A History of Britain* provides a contemporary example of a presenter-led history programme, which refined Clark's and Bronowski's authorial approach. Peter J. Beck, who has written about presenting history, uses Schama to exemplify the 'author-presenter' who is 'responsible for conceptualising, researching, writing, narrating and presenting programmes, even if other historians were consulted to cover gaps in his expertise as well as to help identify key issues and recent scholarship.' Though his authority was enhanced by filming on location, handling objects and pointing to sources, Schama's interpretation of Britain's history

was clearly personal and critical. As an academic historian, distinguishable from Clark and Bronowski, Schama openly accepted the limitations of history, and of history as represented on television.<sup>19</sup>

Though Clark, Bronowski and later Schama all influenced the television histories they presented, *The Life and Times* constituted, as Mountbatten said, 'a "television history" of a type which has never been done before, because never before has a living participant taken part in this way.' *Civilisation* inspired *The Ascent of Man* and Robert Hughes' *The Shock of the New* (1980), and is currently being remade by the BBC, but *The Life and Times* has not provoked any further series which use a presenter-autobiographer. The closest contemporary programmes to this style is the recent *The Man who Discovered Egypt*, which biographically examines the life of Flinders Petrie and the rise of Egyptology, and *Who Do You Think You Are?* in which individuals discuss their own lives and discover new information about their ancestry. The crux of the matter is whether this uniqueness had a positive or negative impact on the legacy of the series, the genre of history on television and television programming in general. Though the presenter-autobiographer was novel and well received in 1969, the format is not mentioned in current academic literature, nor has it been repeated by broadcasters.

### Production

In the 1 January 1969 edition of the *TV Times*, the date the first episode of *The Life and Times* was broadcast, Morley stated that the series was not about the recreation

of history by himself and Terraine, but about reliving historical events by forming a close partnership with Mountbatten.<sup>20</sup> In order to form the basis for this relationship, Morley and Terraine began by interviewing Mountbatten in the familiar setting of his home at Broadlands, near Southampton. The resulting transcripts were hundreds of pages long and became the foundation document for Terraine to structure the original treatment for the, then, 13 programmes. The recordings also suggested a list of filming locations, which eventually included Singapore, India, Malta, 10 Downing Street and Christ's College, Cambridge; and a list of contributors, such as the Duke of Edinburgh, General Eisenhower and Indira Gandhi.

The principal significance of the interviews at Broadlands was in their translation to a script that was to be read by Mountbatten. Terraine composed the script based on Mountbatten's own language in the hope that Mountbatten would feel more at ease conveying his own version of events on film. The intention was for Mountbatten to memorise his lines and recite them directly into the camera. Morley knew this was a risk, considering Mountbatten was not used to learning lines and performing for television, but there was no alternative if Mountbatten was to be the series' presenter. During filming, Mountbatten proved he could achieve what had been asked of him, though the process was challenging for both him and the crew: in Malta, Mountbatten's difficulty with a particular speech led Morley to stop filming after 17 takes and shoot the scene in 2 parts instead. On the whole, however, Morley enjoyed working with Mountbatten. In his memoirs, Morley remembered him as making everyone, regardless of rank or stature, feel immediately comfortable, and that he appreciated honesty. Philip Ziegler, in Mountbatten's

official biography, added that, although Mountbatten had strong opinions, he accepted the producer's expertise during the making of *The Life and Times*.

Morley and Terraine were additionally wary of creating a hagiography of Mountbatten. Morley admits the pair came 'under his spell' and recognised that they needed to find a balance between the facts and Mountbatten's 'charming and persuasive "the great I am" syndrome.'<sup>21</sup> Frankland has also suggested that Mountbatten was not naturally disposed to the objective scrutiny of history in which he had been involved, but expected his own contribution to be conveyed favourably. When Frankland visited Broadlands, he encountered Mountbatten's archives, which Mountbatten had organised himself. In fact, they seemed to have been constructed to demonstrate his achievements - he would write to significant contemporaries and ask questions that were crucial to his reputation. The answers would invariably return in a complimentary manner, and would then be filed to prove how right Mountbatten had been on important issues, such as the Dieppe Raid. Frankland thus congratulated Morley and Terraine for avoiding the hagiographic peril. He believed they produced a serious historical study, whilst also adopting a sympathetic attitude to Mountbatten, which he considered a 'perfectly legitimate attitude on the part of the biographer.'<sup>22</sup>

Though originally produced by Rediffusion, *The Life and Times* was eventually aired by the ITA broadcaster Thames with the first episode shown on 1 January 1969. In 1967, Lord Hill, Chairman of the ITA, undertook a dramatic shake-up of its companies, which altered the various components of ITV. Rediffusion, based in



London, was forced to merge with ABC, in the Midlands, to create a new Monday to Friday, London franchise holder, Thames. At the time of the reshuffle, Morley was in the middle of making *The Life and Times* for Rediffusion, a production company that would disappear, and his unfinished programme would be handed over to the new franchise. Furthermore, the Managing Director of Thames, Howard Thomas, had previously run ABC, which was noted for its dramas and light entertainment and had produced little in the way of documentary. Thomas did not think *The Life and Times* was a 'good fit' for the new channel and wanted to reduce the series to 6, half-hour programmes. In the hope of persuading Thomas to maintain the making of the series as it was, Morley, Terraine and Brabourne met with Thomas and other executives for a screening of the second episode. Though Howard did not feel inclined to cover the extra costs of the hour-long programmes, the small trial audience enjoyed their glimpse into the series and agreed that a compromise could be reached with Rediffusion over the finances. The proposed royal premiere at the IWM clinched the deal. Thomas prioritised publicity and proceeded to allow the one-hour concept, as well as invite the whole crew to join Thames once Rediffusion had closed down.<sup>23</sup>

*The Life and Times* was broadcast by Thames at the peak time of 9pm on Wednesdays. This was lauded as a risky but credible move by Thomas, and the series opened to popular and critical acclaim. The BBC insisted on the later 10.30pm slot for the rest of the country.<sup>24</sup> Although the statistics on factual history programming seem to suggest the BBC was the more obvious and serious choice for a series such as *The Life and Times*, Thames was prepared to gamble on a peak entertainment slot. In fact, Thames had overtaken the BBC as London's first choice for viewing in

the 10 months since its inception and it claimed that *The Life and Times* was the most successful documentary series ever to appear on screen.<sup>25</sup>

### Reception

Though not a contractual request, Frankland suggested to Morley that the premiere of *The Life and Times* should be held at the IWM's cinema. Mountbatten was not only agreeable but subsequently invited 17 members of the Royal Family to attend. The royal premiere, on 19 December 1968, was one of 3 previews held at the museum, and included Harold Wilson and the surviving past Prime Ministers, the Service Chiefs, Church leaders and newspaper owners amongst the guests.<sup>26</sup> Such an occasion was a unique event. The Queen had never before attended a film preview, except for charity, and the 17 royal guests made *The Life and Times* premiere the largest ever gathering of royalty outside a state occasion. Thames decided to capitalise on this exclusive event by televising the premiere in a show entitled *A Royal Preview*, which provided the public with a glimpse of the Queen on screen. This was aired at 11pm on the same night.

The huge publicity from the televised royal premiere benefited both the IWM and Thames. Through it Thames would gain an additional slot of high viewing figures and an opportunity to showcase the forthcoming programmes. For the IWM, *A Royal Preview* highlighted its involvement with the project and put the museum premises on camera during a high profile occasion. Furthermore, the premiere occurred 2 months after the arson attack on the museum's dome on 13 October 1968. The

seemingly paradoxical combination of the arsonist's protest and the royal premiere boosted the museum's positive media presence in an era which otherwise saw the IWM struggle against negative public criticism of its name and subject - 'imperial' and 'war' both having negative connotations in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>27</sup>

As for *The Life and Times* itself, the critical reception in the British press was generally positive. Reviewers enjoyed the series and liked Mountbatten, though some commentators were sceptical of the muddling of the individual story and broader historical events, as well as to the potential for parody. The discussion ranged from labelling the series an important historical document, a fascinating social document and a magnificent piece of filming in the *Television Mail*, to a 'condensed and cramped version' of *The Great War* in the *Daily Express*. However, *The Life and Times* did not suffer in all the inevitable comparisons. Maurice Wiggin for *The Sunday Times* praised the tone and style of Morley and Terraine's work. Wiggin argued that Terraine's script was 'delightfully free from rhetoric' and that Morley had given a straightforward history lesson in the first episode, suggesting that *The Life and Times* was in fact less biased and convoluted than *The Great War*. On the other hand, a writer at the *Financial Times* felt that the two series were too similar and that this demonstrated the need to reinvent the history on television format. The reviewer demanded more from the creators of histories on screen, a rare critical note considering the praise received by *The Great War* and *The World at War* today.<sup>28</sup>

Wiggin was also disappointed with the lack of focus on Mountbatten. Reviewers at the *Guardian*, *Manchester and London* and the *Daily Express* felt the same; the first was confused as to whether the programme was history or personal reminiscences and wanted either more of both, or for the production to decide which one to favour, while the *Express* thought that Mountbatten's personality had not been adequately exposed and that the series thus seemed like an 'endorsed and authorised biography,' which in some ways it was. Most reviewers warmed to Mountbatten as the presenter, often in spite of themselves, recognising that people are more interested in other people than in events, and that his likeability and self-assurance appealed to both adults and children. In particular, the newspapers commended the anecdotes that were personal to Mountbatten, for example, his father's forced resignation from the Navy due to anti-German feeling in Britain.<sup>29</sup> Mountbatten's memories endeared him to the viewer and also showed him at his most relevant as a presenter, and at his most vulnerable as a human being. In these moments, the concept of the presenter-autobiographer proved successful.

Few reviewers discussed *The Life and Times* in terms of its portrayal of history and its contribution to history on television. Those who did were encouraged by Morley and Terraine's venture into the booming nostalgia industry; *The Sunday Telegraph* called the series the magnum opus of the genre.<sup>30</sup> Another journalist acknowledged the novel weaving together of Mountbatten's life with the events of a century, despite the unclear distinction of how this was intended to be portrayed:

There is some debate as to whether Terraine has used Mountbatten as a peg on which to hang history, or whether history has hung its hat on Mountbatten, but the exact nature of the device is not really important. What matters is that it works. History, plus personal recollection of involvement in the making of history-it is an unbeatable mixture.<sup>31</sup>

The broadcasts additionally sparked a public debate between Frankland, Arthur Marwick, Ernest Lindgren and Thorold Dickinson on academic historians' interest in film and television. This started when Frankland expressed his disappointment about the reception of *The Life and Times* by historians and critics alike in a letter to the editor at *The Times*. Though he did not expect a reaction from historians, who were only just beginning to understand the importance of photographs as historical evidence, he was more surprised that journalists had also missed the point of the series; that the presentation of Mountbatten and the 20<sup>th</sup> century was both history and an historical work. Marwick responded to Frankland's comments in an article in *The Listener*. He stated that although historians were aware of film as a form of history, they had not yet been vocal about their research. Marwick suggested that no one, especially television professionals, was attuned to the academic historians' involvement with film and history, which included the University Historians' Film Committee, the Film Committee of the Historical Association as well as a consortium of university history departments. As for *The Life and Times* itself, Marwick felt that the biographical approach, which he admitted had provided unity to the series, had overstated the historical significance of Mountbatten. However, he recognised that the new footage of Mountbatten was valuable to historians.

Lindgren, curator of the National Film Archive (NFA), shared Frankland's impatience with the slow realisation of educationalists that film could be an important medium in historical study. Lindgren additionally disagreed with Marwick because he felt only a few historians were genuinely aware of the significance of film for historical study. This was not, however, solely the fault of the historians. Films must be discovered and preserved, two activities then only being carried out by the NFA and IWM, in order to be useful. Furthermore, popular television series, such as *The Life and Times*, were given brief public exposure as entertainment, and there was no guarantee that they would be used in academia. After Lindgren, Dickinson, who established the film studies department at the Slade, wrote to *The Times* in support of the NFA and IWM, which had helped the Slade with its film endeavours.<sup>32</sup>

In Britain, the series was a public success. *The Life and Times* obtained positive press reviews and was noted for its history, and praised by historians and television professionals at the time. Seven episodes rated in the London Top Ten and one episode achieved the number one slot. Morley won the Royal Television Society's Silver Medal for *The Life and Times*, which was also nominated for a BAFTA in 1970. Emma Hanna, who has written about the significance of *The Great War* in Britain, has argued that historians must understand and analyse documentaries as influential contributions to public history, a form of popular history designed to be consumed by mass audiences. Her reading of the First World War series is a reminder that *The Life and Times* was aimed at the television-viewing public, who differ from scholars in their historical knowledge, and who of course form a significant critical audience.<sup>33</sup>

In addition, *The Life and Times* was instrumental in the making of *The World at War*. Taylor Downing has suggested that Thomas and Jeremy Isaacs, who produced *The World at War*, at Thames, neither of whom were involved in the actual making of *The Life and Times*, were left pondering the lessons of a successful historical series for independent television.<sup>34</sup> However, the subject matter, which simultaneously focused on Mountbatten and touched on a multiplicity of 20<sup>th</sup> century events, affected the series' lasting impact. Unlike the clear focus of *The Great War* and *The World at War*, the subjects of *The Life and Times* have not endured as the First and Second World Wars have in popular memory. Mountbatten was a familiar personality in the late 1960s but he is not as well-known now, and the broader history covered in *The Life and Times* was addressed in both *The Great War* and *The World at War*, in what has proved to be a more enduring format. Moreover, though reviewers warmed to Mountbatten in 1969, popular memory of this 'great man' has exaggerated the potential for parody and obscured the successful and novel insight into an individual's life as related to wider, historical events.

After 1969, when Mountbatten endeavoured to sell the series to foreign networks, *The Life and Times*' popularity waned. Though the programmes had sold to Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and France, Germany and the United States had expressed interest, the latter 3 proved harder to negotiate with. Mountbatten resorted to using his connections. The series was sold to France but the script had to be changed as it was felt the Second World War programmes treated the French unfairly, and Mountbatten appealed to De Gaulle for support. A similar situation occurred in Germany where Mountbatten appealed to Princess Margaret of Hesse.

The US was the most difficult television market: Henry Ford II was invited to Broadlands, but he could not convince network chiefs that *The Life and Times* would attract an audience large enough to sustain advertising revenue. The episodes were eventually shown on PBS, the United States' non-commercial channel.<sup>35</sup> Unlike *The Great War* and *The World at War*, *The Life and Times* did not become a global success with re-runs occurring to this day in Britain (the BBC offer both series on iPlayer as well) and the US. Downing has argued that it was probably *The Life and Times* that set a precedent for buying world rights because it had 'an obvious international appeal.' In reality, the appeal was insignificant and the series subsequently proved that its impact and legacy would be felt neither nationally nor globally.

#### *The Great War, The Life and Times and The World at War*

Today, academic historians and television producers consider *The Great War* an exemplary factual history programme, and its successor, *The World at War*, as having refined both the oral history and archive film format.<sup>36</sup> These series focused exclusively on the two major wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; *The Great War* offered 26 episodes on the First World War, and *The World at War* consisted of 26 episodes on the Second World War. Their successes are widely known whilst the role of *The Life and Times* in the evolution of accurate history programming for television has largely been ignored by scholars. This section outlines the context of the IWM collaboration on the making of the Mountbatten series and elaborates upon its pivotal position in improving relations between the museum and television broadcasters.



Roger Smither, who has worked at the IWM since 1970, has argued that the subject of war dominates the genre of history on television because the use of archive footage is cheaper than creating new film, as well as due to the British familiarity with the events of 1914-1918 and 1939-1945.<sup>37</sup> Dillon has also suggested that the cost was one of the principal reasons *The Great War* was made; the series was not born out of a visionary desire to break new ground, but from the working practices of BBC's *Tonight* team, who were looking for inexpensive footage around which it could structure programmes. Furthermore, the opportunity for a series on the First World War presented itself on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its outbreak in 1964.<sup>38</sup> The success of *The Great War* was not solely due to chance, however. The innovative use of oral history and archive film made for both entertaining television and accessible history.<sup>39</sup> The oral history interviews were conducted by the BBC with First World War veterans. The series was thus animated by ordinary people who spoke directly to the viewer, rather than by the distant politicians and generals the television audience was used to seeing. This was another relatively cheap but effective technique.<sup>40</sup>

However, from the IWM's point of view, especially Frankland's, *The Great War* was a failure in accurate history programming. Frankland was angered by the use of reconstructed material, without the necessary clarification that it was so, when the series was aired. The episodes mixed real First World War film with training exercises, and some of the moving images were even flipped round so as not to confuse an audience who would expect the allies to advance left to right, and the

Germans from right to left. As a result, *The Great War* features an unusually high proportion of left-handed soldiers. Correlli Barnett, one of the historians who worked on the series, dismissed the fake images as of little consequence. Isaacs agreed with Barnett: he felt the argument over the archive footage was a minor flaw on a major work.<sup>41</sup> IWM staff were additionally frustrated that they had not been permitted to vet each episode of *The Great War* before it was aired, as IWM made certain was written into the contract with the BBC. Frankland scribbled handwritten notes on the programmes' synopses when he eventually received them. On episode 9, entitled 'ANSAC means "Almost",' Frankland advised 'ANZAC not ANSAC,' whilst for episode 22, 'On Sea and Air,' he was concerned that civil involvement was 'seemingly left out...first national war.'<sup>42</sup>

As a result of the challenges with *The Great War*, the IWM, and particularly Frankland, became suspicious of producers and broadcasters asking to use their collections. *The Life and Times* was thus a breakthrough in the IWM's relationship with television companies and paved the way for the collaboration with Thames on *The World at War*, though it has also been suggested that Frankland's admiration of 'great men' and royalty were reasons for the museum's new venture into history on television in the Mountbatten series. The achievements of the IWM-Rediffusion broadcast, and its commitment to authentic film and images, resulted in the subsequent IWM-Thames collaboration, *The World at War*. Though unsure of its historical merits, Isaacs acknowledges that *The Life and Times* was the first series that whetted commercial television's appetite for history, especially as it proved a

large scale documentary could feature in the schedule without loss of revenue or audience.<sup>43</sup>

Isaacs, at Thames, went on to work with the IWM in the same way as the BBC and Rediffusion had on *The Great War* and *The Life and Times*; a deal was made to use the museum's archives and the staff's expertise in exchange for copies of the completed film. Frankland was also asked to act as historical adviser on *The World at War*, an independent position from the contract with the museum. If *The Life and Times* has not had an impact on scholars interested in history and television, it certainly influenced Frankland's decision to involve both the IWM and himself into another broadcasting project. In comparison to *The Great War*, the IWM was pleased with *The World at War*. It was thought the BBC would be a natural home for a factual history programme on the Second World War, but the tax levied by the government on ITV companies was reduced in 1971, allowing the excess money to be spent on programmes. Isaacs immediately suggested *The World at War* and Thames quickly assented to what would be a low budget series.<sup>44</sup> The 26 episodes used the same format as *The Great War*; oral history interspersed with archive film and images, and proved to be another instant success. The programmes averaged 6-7 million viewers, the series won an Emmy, and was replayed on British and American television for decades.<sup>45</sup> *The World at War* was, however, criticised for incorporating a pre-determined bias. This has been referred to in a range of ways by scholars: as a pre-defined agenda about what Thames wanted to say about the Second World War, as an anti-war text, and even as making it appear as if the Second World War had been staged for the benefit of a television series. Conversely,

Taylor Downing, who has written the definitive text on *The World at War* as one of the BFI 'TV Classics', suggests that the enduring popularity of the Second World War series is due to its unbiased approach and reluctance to create a triumphant atmosphere; instead, *The World at War* shows war and conflict in all their horror.<sup>46</sup>

In acknowledging the similarities and successes of *The Great War* and *The World at War*, it is easier to understand how *The Life and Times* became lost in the history television landscape of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The main differences include the subject, format and length, clearly the 3 most significant and comparable features of the series on the First and Second World Wars. *The Life and Times* addresses one micro and one macro history, though both broad in their scope; the life of a single man and the events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The series achieved this through the use of archive film, oral history interviews, new film on location and a presenter-autobiographer on screen. Mountbatten as presenter differed from the successful presenter-led history programming seen on British television in the 1950s and early 1960s featuring, for example, Taylor and Clark. The variety, and rarity, of the subjects and techniques used in the making of *The Life and Times* created a complicated format, one that was not easily and cheaply replicable, which provides an additional reason (alongside Mountbatten's overbearing personality) that the series has largely been ignored by historians.

## Conclusion

The introduction asked the following questions: did *The Life and Times* matter? What was its social purpose and value? How can old programmes help us understand current debates about television? The examination of the reception of *The Life and Times* demonstrates that the series did matter and did have an impact at the time of its release in 1969. The high public viewing figures ensured many of the episodes featured in the Top Ten listings; the newspaper reviewers responded positively; and the critics recognised Morley and Terraine's achievements in the nomination for a BAFTA in the category 'Best Factual: Documentary'. The series even prompted a debate between historians, particularly Frankland and Marwick, who brought the emerging film and history movement into the public sphere. Perhaps the most significant effect of the series though, following on from Hanna's research into the effects of *The Great War*, was the impression made on the public. History-on-television, of which *The Life and Times* is an example, is an exercise in popular and public history, disciplines which intend to engage with a mass audience. In 1969, *The Life and Times* certainly achieved mass appeal.

The lack of social purpose and value was perhaps the series' downfall. The relevance and likeability of Mountbatten was debatable and challenging even in the late 1960s when he was a prominent public figure. Now, there exists a different public that is much less aware of Mountbatten's name and influence. In addition, *The Life and Times* has not been replayed by broadcasters, who continue to air *The Great War* and *The World at War*, both of which, though simultaneously specific and broad in their subject matter, have retained relevance and popularity. There is no public access to Morley and Terraine's work and thus any possibility of repeated success is

restricted. Of course, this restriction is directly connected to an audience who may not now be as interested in the experiences of Mountbatten.

It is clear that *The Life and Times* has also been excluded from recent scholarly discussions about history on television. Though it has been left out, what can the series tell us about history programming then and now? *The Life and Times* challenged and continues to challenge television documentary formats; Morley and Terraine deliberately entered into a project that would provide a new and different approach to public history. In 2010, Dillon categorized the documentary formats for television history as follows: the classic mix of interviews, voice-over and archive footage; the presenter as a screen guide providing a shared experience; and the past recreated through CGI.<sup>47</sup> Though these groupings are not incorrect, this seems an insufficient list. In order to understand more about the changes in public history over the last 50 years, academic historians interested in television and history ought to widen the discussion to include series that defy these simple classifications.

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Author's contact details:

Rebecca Coll, Christ's College, St Andrew's Street, Cambridge CB2 3BU

[rc612@cam.ac.uk](mailto:rc612@cam.ac.uk)

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<sup>1</sup> Mountbatten Archive MB1/K323, Peter Morley, 'Living History', *TV Times*, January 1, 1969.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Dillon, *History on British Television: Constructing Nation, Nationality and Collective Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 94.

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- <sup>3</sup> Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Volume V: Competition* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), 414-415; Dillon, 139-150; Luisa Cigognetti and Pierre Solin, History on television: the problem of sources, in: Ann Gray and Erin Bell (ed.), *Televising History: Mediating the Past in Postwar Europe* (London, 2010), 30; Erin Bell, Beyond the witness: the layering of historical testimonies on British television, in: Gray and Bell (ed.), 79; John Corner, 'Once upon a time...': visual design and documentary openings, in: Gray and Bell (ed.), 14; Emma Hanna, Landscape and Memory: British Televisual Representations of the Battle of the Somme, in: Gray and Bell (ed.), 109; James Chapman, *The World at War: Television, Documentary, History*, in: Graham Roberts and Philip M. Taylor (ed.), *The Historian, Television and Television History* (Luton, 2001); Taylor Downing, Bringing the past to the small screen, in: David Cannadine (ed.), *History and the Media* (London, 2004), 8-10; Jeremy Isaacs, All our yesterdays, in: Cannadine (ed.), 38-46; Taylor Downing, *The World at War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Emma Hanna, A small screen alternative to stone and bronze: *The Great War* series and British Television, *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10 (2007), 88-111.
- <sup>4</sup> Dominic Sandbrook, *State of Emergency: The Way we Were: Britain, 1970-1974* (London: Penguin, 2010), 45-46.
- <sup>5</sup> Dillon, 35-56.
- <sup>6</sup> IWM EN3/1/23/1; IWM EN2/1/BRI/1; IWM, *Film and Video Archive Handbook: A User's Guide*, 1997.
- <sup>7</sup> Philip Ziegler, *Mountbatten: The Official Biography* (London: Fontana, 1990), 667; Mountbatten Archive MB1/K323, Malcolm Barker, 'Lord Mountbatten and the pinnacles of power,' *The Yorkshire Post*, November 11, 1968.
- <sup>8</sup> Mountbatten Archive MB1/K312, 'Programme 1 Sequence A Intro (Broadlands)'.
- <sup>9</sup> IWM ENS/3/23/001 Letter from John Rowe, Film Researcher, Thames to John Sutters, IWM, 25 March, 1969.
- <sup>10</sup> John Terraine, *The Life and Times of Lord Mountbatten* (London: Arrow, 1980), 45-6.
- <sup>11</sup> Taylor Downing, *Night Raid: The True Story of the First Victorious British Para Raid of WWII* (London: Little, Brown, 2013), 310-318.
- <sup>12</sup> Mountbatten Archive MB1/K323, 'The extraordinary Mountbattens,' *The People*, December 1, 1968.
- <sup>13</sup> Peter Morley won a BAFTA in 1964 in the category Television: Factual for *Tyranny: The Years of Adolf Hitler* and in 1966 in Television: Outside Broadcasts 1966 for *The State Funeral of Sir Winston Churchill*.
- <sup>14</sup> Peter Morley, *A Life Rewound* (Royal Television Society, 2006), RTS e-Book, 156-160.
- <sup>15</sup> Terraine, *The Life and Times*.
- <sup>16</sup> Peter J. Beck, *Presenting History: Past and Present* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 44 and 68.
- <sup>17</sup> Chris Stephens and John Paul-Stonard, introduction to *Kenneth Clark: Looking for Civilisation* (London: Tate, 2014), 9; John Wyver, 'Television,' in: Chris Stephens and John Paul-Stonard (ed.), *Kenneth Clark: Looking for Civilisation* (London, 2014), 123-131.
- <sup>18</sup> Jacob Bronowski, *The Ascent of Man* (London: BBC, 1973), 15-16.
- <sup>19</sup> Beck, 101-3 and 114.
- <sup>20</sup> Mountbatten Archive MB1/K323, Morley, 'Living History.'
- <sup>21</sup> Morley, 157-162; Ziegler, 668.
- <sup>22</sup> Noble Frankland, *History at War: The Campaigns of an Historian*, (London: DLM, 1997), 186.
- <sup>23</sup> Morley, 168-170.
- <sup>24</sup> Thames Television was a London, Monday-Friday franchise. *The Life and Times* was broadcast outside of London by the BBC. Mountbatten Archive MB1/K324, 'Thames Television takes a chance,' *Television Mail*, January 3, 1969; Ziegler, 669.
- <sup>25</sup> From Monday to 7pm on Friday, London viewers could choose between Thames, BBC1 and BBC2. The programmes the television audience liked best were from Thames. Each week a private check was made on the 10 most popular programmes in London during Thames' transmission time and for the 8 weeks ending on 2 May 1969, Thames had 78% of London's 10 weekday favourites against the BBC's 22%. Mountbatten Archive MB1/K324, 'It's 10 months since Thames Television came to London: what difference has it made?' *Financial Times*, May 27, 1969.
- <sup>26</sup> The first preview was on 18 December 1968 for guests invited by the Trustees and the third on the 30 December 1968 for guests invited by the IWM and Thames. IWM EN3/3/23/005/1 Noble Frankland note, July 2, 1968.

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- <sup>27</sup> IWM EN3/3/23/004 In confidence from Frankland to Sir Deric Holland-Martin; Mountbatten Archive MB1/K323, 'Royal smiles for a royal night,' *South London Press*, December 28, 1968; Mountbatten Archive MB1/K309, Ken Roach, 'When royalty goes to the pictures,' *TV Times*; Mountbatten Archive MB1/K323, 'A seat in the royal circle,' *Daily Mirror*, December 19, 1968; Morley, 170-173; IWM MGH 1386 *A Royal Preview*, Directed by Steve Minchin. London: Thames Television, 1968.
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- <sup>30</sup> Mountbatten Archive MB1/K324, Philip Purser, 'A plug in the arm,' *The Sunday Telegraph*, January 5, 1969.
- <sup>31</sup> Mountbatten Archive MB1/K324 Peter Quince, 'His sisters and his cousins and his aunts,' *Huddersfield Examiner*, January 4, 1969.
- <sup>32</sup> Mountbatten Archive MB1/K324, Noble Frankland, letter to the editor, *The Times*, April 1, 1969; Mountbatten Archive MB1/K324, Arthur Marwick, 'Video-History,' *The Listener*, May 1, 1969; IWM Film documents LOC 608 Conference papers 1969 1 'Film and the Historian,' Lindgren's letter to *The Times* published on 11 April 1969 and Dickinson's on 16 April 1969.
- <sup>33</sup> Hanna, A small screen, 90.
- <sup>34</sup> Morley, 174; Downing, *The World at War*, 22.
- <sup>35</sup> Ziegler, 669.
- <sup>36</sup> Bell, 79; Downing, *Bringing the past*, 10.
- <sup>37</sup> Roger Smither, Why is so much television history about war? in: Cannadine (ed.), 61.
- <sup>38</sup> Dillon, 142.
- <sup>39</sup> Dillon, 144; Downing, *Bringing the past*, 8-9.
- <sup>40</sup> Cigognetti and Solin, 30.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid, 38.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>43</sup> Isaacs, 39.
- <sup>44</sup> Chapman, 131; Isaacs, 40.
- <sup>45</sup> Downing, *Bringing the past*, 10.
- <sup>46</sup> Dillon, 150; Chapman, 140-141; Dai Vaughan, *Television Documentary Usage* (London: BFI, 1976), 17.
- <sup>47</sup> Dillon, 94.

Rebecca Louise Coll is an AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award student working on a project entitled, 'Noble Frankland and the Reinvention of the Imperial War Museum, 1960-1982,' with the University of Cambridge and the Imperial War Museum, London. As an undergraduate, Rebecca studied for a BA (Hons) Theology at the



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